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ABSTRACT

Several elementary schools that drew their students from low socioeconomic (SES) areas and which succeeded in teaching reading were studied to determine the main causes of their academic achievements. Interviews, analyses of test scores and work logs, classroom observation, and reviews of school memos indicated two primary causes of success: achievement orientation and building-wide instructional efficiency. An achievement orientation, which generally must come from the building principal, is a high-risk, yet essential mode of operation in low SES areas, because it creates the conditions under which efficient instruction might develop. Instructional efficiency depends on adaptability and consistency of instruction, which, in turn, depend on the range of abilities in each classroom, the monitoring of student progress, the availability and coordination of personnel, the stability of the instructional program, and the program's compatibility across grade levels. School districts that want to raise reading scores should encourage principals to become achievement-oriented curricular leaders, both through inservice training and through principal evaluation procedures that focus on curricular leadership performance. (Author/RL)

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Schools That Succeed Beyond Expectations
in Teaching Reading

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Abstract

Several public elementary schools that drew their students from low SES areas and which succeeded in teaching reading were studied to determine the main causes of their academic achievements. Through interviews, analyses of test scores and work logs, classroom observation, and review of school memos, two primary causes of success were isolated: achievement orientation by the principal or influential school district person, and building-wide instructional efficiency. An achievement orientation, which generally must come from the building principal, but in small districts might come from outside the building, is a high-risk mode of operation in low SES areas, yet is essential for creating the conditions under which efficient instruction might develop. The opposite leadership style, focusing on human relations, is characteristic of many principals in inner-urban and poorer rural schools, and generally excludes an emphasis on academic achievement.

Instructional efficiency is a function of two major building wide characteristics: adaptability and consistency of instruction. Adaptability of instruction depends upon the range of abilities in each classroom, monitoring of student progress, and availability and coordination of personnel. Consistency of instruction depends upon the

stability of the instructional program and its compatibility across grade levels. When all of these factors are in their most positive form, the probability is greatly increased for each student to receive instruction that is appropriate for his or her needs.

School districts that want to raise reading scores should encourage principals to become achievement-oriented curricular leaders, both through in-service training and through principal evaluation procedures that focus on curricular leadership performance.

Schools that Succeed Beyond Expectations in Teaching Reading

In an industrial city of the Atlantic coastal area are two elementary schools that appeared at the end of the 1977/78 school year to be quite similar. Urban School A had 94.5% minority enrollment (mostly Black) and drew from lower to middle income areas. Urban School B drew its enrollment from similar neighborhoods, with 88.5% minority students (mostly Black with some Hispanic). Both were ranked in the lowest one-quarter of the State's elementary schools according to State socioeconomic status (SES) rankings, which were based on such factors as parents' occupations and education, value of housing, and pupil dropout rate. Both schools were constructed in the early 1930s at costs of approximately one-half million dollars each and had been fairly well maintained since then.

In both cases, school enrollment was predominantly white in the late 1950s; Black enrollment increased steadily in the 1960s, with an accelerated changeover occurring at the end of that decade, and into the early 1970s. With the rapid change in school population and the race riots which occurred in the City shortly after the death of Martin Luther King, both schools experienced a period of instability. Urban School A was directed by five different principals from

1964/65 until 1978/79, with the last one, Mr. A, remaining eight years until the school was merged into a county-wide integrated system for the 1978/79 school year. Urban School B was directed by six different principals from 1964/65 until 1978/79, with the last principal, Mr. B, serving only three years before being reassigned in the integrated system. As might have been expected, both schools reported low reading achievement in the Fall of 1971, with the average grade in either school scoring a little over one grade level below the corresponding national average. However, here the similarities between the two schools end.

Reading scores in Urban A began to climb from this point on, crossing from below national norms to above national norms by the Spring of 1975. By the end of the 1977/78 school year, which was the last for Urban A as a city, minority school, over 60% of the children in the school read above grade level. Furthermore, the improvements shown in reading were not gained by concentrating resources on a select group of students. An analysis of pre- and post-test scores for three classrooms for the 1977/78 school year showed that the gains in reading were distributed across the entire ability spectrum. Nor were these gains made by ignoring other school subjects. Achievement scores for mathematics, language, and social studies were also generally good in Urban A and art, music, and physical education were still taught regularly.

Urban B, on the other hand, improved only slightly from 1971/72 until 1977/78, with reading scores during 1977/78 still averaging about eight-tenths of a grade level below national averages.¹ Whatever else may be desired outcomes of schooling and whatever may be the limitations of standardized achievement tests, there is little doubt that by both popular and professional standards, Urban School A was succeeding in teaching reading while Urban School B was not. The question that remains, and which has been the focus of our work over the past two years, is why this difference existed.

From our studies of Urban Schools A and B, including extensive interviews, classroom observation, analyses of school records and principal memos, and review of reading specialist logs--and from similar studies of other low income, high achieving schools--we have developed some hypotheses about schools like Urban School A which succeed where failure is the norm. These hypotheses apply quite well to Urban Schools A and B, and to several other schools we have studied; how well they will explain the successes and failures of a wider range of schools remains to be determined, as do the implications for improving school performance which we present in a concluding section.²

The Basis of School Achievement

Children who come from middle and upper-middle class environments generally learn to read without difficulty under

any rational form of schooling. These children are usually introduced to books and to reading in the home prior to the formal introduction of reading instruction. They also receive from their homes extensive encouragement to succeed in school, extensive assistance in doing homework, and a continual exposure to the attitudes, values, and experiences that the school presents. Lower class children usually do not receive these benefits in the same intensity. In addition, larger family sizes, lower incomes, poorer medical care, and often, poorer nutrition lead to further disadvantages for the lower class child.

The net result is that schools that draw from predominantly low SES families must work extra hard to reach normal achievement. Some states acknowledge this condition by allocating larger per student budgets to low-income area schools; the Federal Government acknowledges this through a batch of special assistance programs: Title I, Title III, Head Start, Follow Through, and the like. However, extra funding and special programs by themselves have not proven sufficient to raise achievement levels of low-SES students.

Instead, we find that for schools that draw their students from low SES areas to succeed in teaching reading, strong building-wide curricular leadership is required. This leadership, which if it exists, usually comes from the principal, must be openly and obviously achievement-oriented. Then,

given strong, achievement-oriented leadership,
the degree of success in reading instruction will be
determined by the instructional efficiency of the school,
which is a function of the adaptability and consistency of
instruction.

For brevity in the discussion which follows, we will refer to these two properties as curricular leadership and instructional efficiency.³

Curricular Leadership

Urban A

The first cause of reading success at Urban A is the principal's leadership. At first glance one might attribute this success to the principal's charm or charisma. But our observations show something quite different. In contrast to several other principals we have observed in inner-urban schools, Mr. A is task rather than human relations oriented.⁴ In interviews he claims that he discourages teachers from bringing their personal problems to him, other than those that might bear directly on school matters. Teachers, on the other hand, commented primarily on the principal's role in directing the school. They did not, in general, view him as either charismatic or manipulative. (However, one teacher thought the principal used behavior modification to make teachers and students feel

they could be successful, while another, who saw the social system in the school as cliquish, claimed that the principal had a grapevine for finding what goes on in the classroom.)

Typical of the responses which teachers made to the question "What is the role of the principal in the reading program?" were these:

A Teacher:

To see that we have the necessary materials; with this program, to see that the aides are there; to see that it's coordinated, that everything is running smoothly, you have to have good management. I think he does well in managing the program and keeping it going as best he can with the cut in funds. I think the management is the main thing.

Another Teacher:

To see that the program is carried out effectively. Working closely with the reading specialist, the reading specialist working with the teachers, the teachers working with the students. It's a chain of command thing almost.

The Librarian:

His enthusiasm. He is convinced that this is a really good program. He convinces the staff that the program is good... He also uses [test] scores as evidence of the success of the program and this has been very convincing.

An Aide:

He sees that the program goes. He wants it done right. Anytime you have problems, you go to him. I let [Mr. A] know if a student who hasn't been performing well starts achieving so that [Mr. A] can reinforce the child. He keeps the program moving.

There are no doubts expressed here about the intent of Mr. A to have a successful reading program or about the curricular leadership which he provides. He attends to materials, coordinates the program, works closely with the reading specialist, encourages and reinforces the staff, and praises children who do well.

Mr. A, a Black male who preaches in a Methodist congregation on weekends, was an intermediate level teacher in the City from 1964 through 1969, and then was the assistant principal at Urban A for a single year before being promoted to principal. His training includes a Bachelor of Science degree in elementary education from Virginia State College, where he was President of the Student Government Association and a Distinguished Military Graduate, plus a Master's Degree in Educational Administration from Temple University. (Currently he is studying toward a Ph.D. in Urban Education.) In the 1975-76 school year Mr. A was awarded a Rockefeller Fellowship and was on loan

to the Rockefeller Foundation as part of a Superintendent's Training Program. In the year after the present study was completed, he was promoted to administrative assistant to one of the Area Superintendents in the newly integrated County district where Urban A is located.

The task which Mr. A applied most of his energies to upon becoming principal at Urban A was raising reading achievement. His approach to this was a high-risk procedure which involved setting a high goal for reading achievement, 60% of the children reading above grade level by national norms, and announcing this goal to staff, parents, and the district administration. In addition, memos were sent to parents periodically, telling them how they could help their children improve in reading. For example, a newsletter dated November, 1974, carried fourteen suggestions "to improve reading skills," ranging from library visits, to providing a quiet place for study, to praise for accomplishments.

Soon after becoming principal at Urban A, he applied for and received a \$50,000 grant from Research for Better Schools to try out an experimental reading program (IPI) and took personal charge of staff development and program implementation. This grant was followed by a \$120,000 grant from the Office of Education (Title III ESEA-Right to Read) for support of the school reading program. After several years of directing the reading program by himself, he promoted one of

his best reading teachers to full-time reading specialist and slowly turned over to her responsibility for staff development and program coordination. By developing a cooperative atmosphere in the school he managed to obtain the teachers' agreement to set reading as the school's top priority. However, Mr. A was continually under pressure from the district reading supervisor to switch to the City-wide reading program, pressure which he resisted throughout his tenure as principal.

Typical of the treatment which Mr. A has given reading in memos to parents is the following excerpt from the school newsletter, written at the end of the 1976/77 school year.

In the beginning of the year, we set as an objective the fact that we wanted 60% of all [Urban A] students to read at or above national norms. In compiling our test scores, we discovered that we not only met that goal but surpassed it at the first four grade levels and almost made it at the fifth. This means that [Urban A] students are reading much better than the average student across the nation.

In summary, Mr. A started his principalship at Urban A with the intent to raise reading achievement. His goals were high and specifically stated: 60% of the children reading at or above grade level. He involved himself directly in the reading program at all levels, but also worked toward building a competent, well-organized staff. Everyone interviewed in the school and in the district office agreed that Mr. A's highest priority was high reading achievement.

Urban B

In contrast to Urban A, Urban B did not have strong curricular leadership nor did it display an intent to raise reading achievement. Mr. B, the principal at Urban B for its last three years as a strictly urban school, had not set reading--or any other curricular subject--as his highest priority. "Physical education and music are just as important as basic skills," he stated in a recent interview. The district reading specialist directs the reading program, he said, because he "just didn't have the time to be involved." Mr. B appeared strongly oriented towards human relations rather than achievement. He worked hard to involve parents, to create a good image for the school, and to organize special programs for students. Among the latter he listed as his major accomplishments a Gospel Choir of 60-80 children which sang at school assemblies, nursing homes, and city clubs (e.g., Kiwanis), and a special program in physical education during after-school hours. He also had definite ideas about the relationship of achievement to the physical plant. "Many studies show," he said, "that when improvements are made in the physical environment of a school, learning is also improved."

Mr. B was an inner-city principal for 11 years: three at Urban A and 8 in a nearby urban area. When he came to Urban B staff relations were a serious problem. Four principals had come and gone in the previous five years; staff leadership was totally absent and teachers were discouraged.

According to him, all of this had changed by the time he left and the curricular programs were running well under his direction.

However, interviews with a variety of school staff members revealed a different view of his role. No one saw him as a curricular leader or as a person committed to raising academic achievement. Except for ordering materials and assisting the District reading resource person in grouping students, no involvement by him in the reading program was mentioned. Instead, staff members spoke about continuing staff relationship problems, lack of coordination of the many special services (Title I, Title VII, bilingual, migrant, Follow Through), and his tendency to avoid involvement in the school's problems. One staff member felt that while reading was the top priority at Urban B, this was only because the District had established reading as the top priority for all of the District schools. Otherwise, Mr. B indicated no special concern for reading achievement. To the question "Are there any specific goals for reading?" the staff's unanimous response was "no."

In short, Mr. B did not emphasize reading in Urban B, nor did he stress student achievement. At best his efforts were focused on human relations: making students, staff and parents feel good about the school and themselves. This lack of achievement orientation, we feel, is the primary reason why Urban B reading scores were so low.

Alternative Sources of Leadership

But is the principal the only individual who can provide a strong achievement orientation for a school building? In most cases the answer is probably yes. Within the school building it is rare to find any other individual who has the authority to lead the entire academic staff. On the other hand, most school districts are too large to allow district level leadership to penetrate the individual buildings. We have studied, however, a small school district where achievement-oriented leadership at the district level seemed to have influenced the district's three elementary schools. This district is in a poor, rural area of southeastern Pennsylvania. The total district enrollment in 1977/78 was 2,850, with about 2,000 of these students in grades K-8. (Rural A encompasses grades K-2; Rural B, grades 3-5, and Rural C, grades 6-8.) Approximately 10% of the students are Black, about 1% are Spanish speaking, and the remainder are white. Parents, who typically work in mushroom farming or at a nearby automotive assembly plant, are described by school personnel as both conservative and apathetic toward schooling. The Superintendent reported that a few parents wanted their children to quit high school and take full-time jobs. According to the Superintendent the average family income for the district is approximately \$11,000 and the average market value of real estate is the lowest in the county. Although a Title I program accommodates only 300 students, 18-20% of the district enrollment qualifies for Title I aid.

With a 2½% state tax, a Byzantine county occupation tax, and a limited local wage tax, the school district has struggled to maintain itself on limited funding. The entire district staff consists of a superintendent, a business manager, four principals, three assistant principals, four tutors, a full-time language arts coordinator, and small clerical staffs. Principals, in addition to their building assignments, also serve directorships (educational programs, special programs, etc.) without extra pay. Several years ago the Director of Educational Programs was a funded position; with recent budget cuts, however, funding for this position was eliminated, and the Director assumed a vacant principalship in one of the schools (Rural B). Until about six years ago the lower primary classes (K-2) were held in rented spaces in local churches. (Kindergarten was first introduced in 1972 under a Title I program and then extended the following year to the entire district.)

The Superintendent from 1970 until the beginning of the 1978/79 school year (Dr. D), was an elementary education undergraduate who rose quickly into a principal's position and then into a superintendent's position in a nearby district. The Director of Educational Programs (Dr. M) was also an elementary education undergraduate and held various science teaching and curriculum development positions before entering the University of Pennsylvania Ed.D. program on a Ford Foundation Fellowship. He came to the District in 1972 as Director of Educational Programs, a title he retained even after funding was

removed from the position.

In this District, the Director of Educational Programs (Dr. M) provided the primary operational leadership, but was supported by the Superintendent (Dr. D). Both were highly achievement oriented and both were involved in upgrading not only reading, but also math and other language arts areas. Beginning in 1972, when Dr. M was appointed, a strong emphasis was placed on reading. After an initial planning period, the school board was induced to set improved reading scores as the district's top priority. In 1973 a district reading committee began to plan an integrated program across the three elementary schools. A language arts guide was developed and intensive in-services were initiated. A time-honored practice of not allowing students to advance beyond their grade levels in reading was quickly eliminated as was the reluctance of teachers to start students on a new reading level within a few months of the end of the school year.

In 1975 the intermediate school was persuaded to increase significantly the amount of time and the size of staff it devoted to language arts. At the same time the Title I tutors were reorganized and made responsible to the building principals. Further changes in the management of the Title I program led to the Title I tutors being included in all faculty meetings and to being placed physically in close proximity to the language arts coordinator. An elaborate grouping procedure was also developed whereby the next year's reading placements, along

with placements for two other subjects, were worked out in the Spring of each year by the language arts coordinator, the Director of Educational Programs, and the various building principals.

1975 was a particularly important year for improvements in the District's reading program. Among the 16 activities from that year that were listed in Dr. M's End of Year Report to the Right to Read Program were the following:

- " ...[Inservice] program on 'Individualizing Reading Instruction.' Twelve teachers participated.
- " ...[Inservice] program 'Students Who Have Reading Problems.' Eleven teachers participated.
- " ...Started a 3-credit graduate course with Penn State [on reading].
- " ...Increased Language Arts Coordinator's time one full day.
- " ...Intermediate School Language Arts Program converted from two Reading teachers to thirteen Language Arts teachers. Included within that is cross-grade level grouping--teachers assigned to other teachers to help.

" ...development of an inservice reading program for three inservice credits for eight reading teachers and three classroom teachers with administration involved.

Two night programs for parents in development of the remedial reading program.

" ...summer curriculum work for the development of a Language Arts Sequence.

Twelve teachers participated.

What is reflected in the complete list is a multi-faceted approach to the improvement of reading instruction, with a heavy emphasis on staff development. No gimmicks or surface coatings are reflected here, just the basics: inservice training, development of instructional objectives, establishment of a remedial reading laboratory, analysis of the testing program, and involvement of parents.

Dr. M appears to have been the main force behind these changes, although Dr. D was involved in the planning stage of each one. All of the staff memoranda on reading which were sent by Dr. M reflect a highly professional and task-oriented tone, but are also friendly. For example, the following paragraph introduced guidelines for "Pupil Diagnostic & Prescriptive Procedures in Reading" (June 17, 1974):

The goal of reading instruction is to guide pupils to achieve their potentials. It becomes increasingly important that plans for instruction be thoughtfully considered and well executed. In planning your instructional program the following principles should serve as guidelines:

1. Effective reading instruction depends on thorough and continual diagnosis of individual proficiencies and deficiencies through both testing and informal analysis.
2. Instruction should be based on a profile of skills revealed by diagnosis and adjusted in response to the pupil's progress.
3. Materials used should be sufficiently difficult to challenge the pupil, but sufficiently easy to ensure their success.
4. No teacher is limited to a narrow range of materials or techniques.

The tutors and teachers interviewed agreed unanimously that at the Rural B school, where Dr. M was principal, reading was the top priority. The teachers agreed completely that under Dr. M teacher morale had improved and that they now had the freedom to try new ideas. Other district staff supported strongly the notion that Dr. M had been the main force behind the improvement of the district reading program.

The other two elementary principals interviewed in this district appeared to be task oriented, but perhaps because of the small size of the district were willing to allow their

reading program to be strongly influenced by the Director of Educational Programs and by the reading coordinator. The principal in Rural A was not seen by other district personnel as an inspiring leader while the principal at Rural B had just become a principal when this project started and saw his role, at least for that year, as "keeping everything rolling."

Validation of success in reading is somewhat less certain for this district than for Urban A. Metropolitan Achievement Test scores range from .2 grades above the mean (grade 2) to .4 grades below the mean (grades 7 and 8). (Grade 5 is exactly at grade level while the other grades are slightly below.) However, for the past three years an increase in middle grade reading ability has been marked by increased orders of higher reading level textbooks. For example, Dr. M reports that no level 13 of Ginn 360 was ordered in the past for fourth grade, but for the 1978/79 school year 20 were required. In addition, Title I gain scores (Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test) have been over one year per year for each of grades 3, 4, and 5 over the past three years. Given these Title I gains, plus reading scores which hover about the mean, plus increased levels of difficulty in reading materials, we feel that this district is succeeding in teaching reading, a success that we attribute more to district-level than to building-level leadership.

Leadership Styles

Strong leadership is one of the positive ingredients for instructional success reported in several other school factor studies.⁵ However, strong leadership can derive from different leadership styles. For example, in a study of the reading program in the Cleveland Schools, the district superintendent was characterized as a strong leader, yet his leadership style resulted in a highly rigid instructional program and a lack of building level curricular leadership.⁶

One scale for defining leadership style establishes a continuum that stretches from task-oriented to human relations oriented.⁷ Although this scale was not developed for educational personnel, we find it a useful initial approach to characterizing school principals. Our conclusion is that the primary trait required of a building leader is an achievement orientation. This means that the principal (or, in rare cases, other leader) must have a strong desire to have high reading scores and must transmit this desire to staff, parents, and pupils. This is, of course, high risk behavior, in that the chances of success are not high, and furthermore, the rewards for success, outside of self-satisfaction, may be small.

An achievement (or task) orientation does not, however, exclude good human relations practices. A capable principal can stress achievement while maintaining good relations with staff, parents, and pupils. What we observed, however, was that a primary orientation toward human relations often excluded an emphasis on achievement. Human relations is

important, but it should not be used to replace a responsibility for improving the curricular program.

Schools in poverty areas need to struggle to obtain high student achievement. Principals who don't have the interest or energy for this struggle, or who fear it will not be won, have a convenient cop-out in human relations. By concentrating his or her efforts on good community relations, good staff relations, and positive student attitudes towards themselves and the school, a principal can become well liked, look busy, and have a happy, humming building. The students and their parents will lose in the end, but they probably will not realize the principal's neglect in their failure to achieve. The findings from a number of school studies reinforce this view. The Maryland State Department of Education reports from a study of 30 high and low residual achievement schools, that "...the [high residual school] principal tends to be more oriented towards the cognitive and less towards the affective. The [low residual school] principals tend to be somewhat the opposite..."⁸ Similarly, in a survey of 34 high schools which have shown no S.A.T. score decline over the past 15 years, it was reported that "The constant among the successful S.A.T. score schools is intent, not technique."⁹ And, a recent study of the impact of the Emergency School Aid Act found principal's concern for instruction to distinguish schools that were successfully raising student achievement from those that weren't.¹⁰

In brief, in the most successful urban school the principal was highly achievement oriented and an effective leader of his reading programs. In the rural schools the principals seemed achievement oriented, but all were not strong curricular leaders. In these cases, the District personnel were primarily responsible for the program success.

Instructional Efficiency

We can't pretend to have uncovered the definitive description of efficient reading instruction, but we do feel that several dimensions of such a description can be defined. Instructional efficiency (or 'technical rationality' in organizational terms¹¹) relates to utilization of instructional resources to achieve maximal student outcomes. Instructional resources include time, personnel, materials, and money. Student outcomes involve primarily student achievement, although student attitudes are also counted in this category. An example of an efficient utilization of instructional resources is remedial reading instruction that is given in the classroom at times when the students receiving such aid are not pulled from critical instruction (e.g., reading). Except by the most cynical view, an example of an inefficient use of instructional resources is a remedial reading program that pulls students from the classroom during their normal reading period. According to a recent study of Title I programs, this latter practice is not only common, but increases with increasing status of the Title I instructor.¹²

In our studies of successful schools, the instructional variables that related most directly to instructional efficiency were adaptability and consistency of instruction.

Adaptability of Instruction

By adaptability of instruction we mean the degree to which each student is receiving instruction that he or she needs. "Individualization of instruction" is the phrase most often applied to this idea, but we find "individualization" to be ambiguous, occasionally denotating the impractical or the impossible. Most teachers attempt to adapt their instruction to student needs, but the degree to which they can do this (assuming they want to) often depends on the range of abilities that they must accommodate in the classroom, monitoring of student progress, and availability and coordination of extra personnel.

Range of Abilities

Whatever may have been the virtues of the single-room school house wherein a single teacher administered to the educational needs of all grade-level students, the present-day teacher finds it extremely difficult to teach reading (or any other curricular subject) when classroom abilities are too wide. To overcome this problem, students are usually assigned to whole classes on the basis of reading ability or are temporarily grouped by ability for reading instruction.

We observed a wide range of different approaches in grouping for instruction, but in general found that the successful schools strongly emphasized homogeneous grouping for reading. Urban A generally assigned students to classrooms on the basis of reading ability, but attempted one year to group heterogeneously. This was found by the teachers to be unworkable and therefore ability groupings were quickly restored. The rural schools spent considerable time each Spring determining reading groups for the coming year. Often four or five groups were assigned to a single classroom, yet the range of abilities within a single classroom was always limited. In spite of occasional criticism and less than substantial research support, ability grouping is a standard practice for reading instruction in American schools. To group otherwise appears to be inefficient both for students and for teachers. A complaint heard occasionally in the successful schools was that even with ability groupings, occasionally a class would still have too wide a range of abilities for effective instruction. All of the successful schools monitored student and teacher progress continually, however, and switched students between groups or classes to alleviate such problems.

How many groups a teacher can manage depends upon such factors as the range of student abilities represented, the

number of different reading programs involved, the outside support available, and the abilities of the teacher. In the successful schools the availability and competencies of the specialist (or coordinator) and the tutors allowed a wider range of abilities to be handled than might be done in other contexts. Without well-coordinated assistance, much less progress in reading would be expected.

Monitoring of Student Progress

A factor that was present in the successful schools but lacking in the unsuccessful one was careful monitoring of student progress. In the successful schools the principals (along with the language arts specialists) reviewed student progress periodically and inquired when slower than expected rates were observed. No such system seemed to be used in Urban B. This monitoring has two effects: first, it allows resources to be deployed where they are most needed, that is, in helping children who are falling behind, and second, it lets the classroom teacher know that the progress of her or his students is a concern of the entire school.

Availability and Coordination of Personnel

Schools in low income areas must work extra hard to achieve normal student progress. The middle-class home support and motivation are often lacking, the range of abilities within a grade level are often exceptionally large and the expectations of teachers are often too low. To help meet these

problems, most schools in low SES areas have received extra personnel in the form of Title I or bilingual instructors, tutors, aides, and the like. Middle class schools also have extra personnel, but success or failure in promoting student achievement does not depend as heavily on the efficient use of non-regulars as it does in the low SES schools.

But to ensure that extra personnel involved with reading reinforce regular reading instruction requires coordination within the building of all school personnel. The desired outcome is referred to in modern organization theory as client-centered delivery of services. The opposite condition tends to be profession-centered delivery of services whereby each professional maintains his or her separate professional identity rather than merging into a coordinated, student-centered plan.

Urban A and Rural Schools A-C had student-centered reading services. In Urban A, all personnel except a part-time reading specialist who worked exclusively with the upper grades were assigned permanently to the school. The total reading staff included the classroom teachers, the full-time reading specialist, the part-time reading specialist, the librarian, and five aides. All except one aide and the part-time specialist had been with the school since the current reading program was implemented in 1972. All were familiar with the skills being taught at each level and with the instructional procedures that were followed.

The reading specialist in Urban A coordinated the reading personnel, although the teachers seldom mentioned this as one of her primary functions. This resulted, we feel, from the service role which the reading specialist had created. All of the teachers and aides who were interviewed, however, made highly positive comments about the specialist. "[She] is fabulous," a fifth grade teacher stated, "The things she does, she must work five hours a night every night. It's unbelievable the things she gets together to give to the teachers [or] to hand to the parents. Her work is unlimited." A third grade teacher summarized the specialist's activities thusly: "She tests; she compiles activities that would help--any new ideas, games, learning games in content areas, in the area of reading; she runs off materials for building vocabulary for the IPI program; she orders materials; she gets supplementary materials that we might need as far as dittoes; she does a little bit of everything that involves improving reading."

The reading specialist's work log, covering 611 different activities (43,407 minutes) over about a six month period, showed that she spent about 38% of her time with students in specialized instruction and tutoring; about 16% working with teachers and other staff members; another 16% in assessment of students; and the remainder in development of materials (9%),

administration (8%), professional advancement (5%), and miscellaneous chores (9%: field trips, meetings with parents, spelling bees, etc.). She felt that her relations with the teachers and aides were especially good because she had no authoritative role in the school. Yet she was often asked for advice by the principal on matters related to individual teachers.

The aides assisted only with reading, rotating grade levels every 50 minutes throughout the day. The 12 teachers interviewed agreed completely on the role of the aides in the program and on their ability to alert teachers to individual student problems. According to these teachers, approximately two notes per week from the aides were received by a teacher on individual student needs or progress. The aides were also respected by the teaching staff for their understanding of their work and for their handling of students. "I feel the aides' judgment values are good," one staff member commented. "They are self confident enough to make judgments concerning individual answers... Also, the way they deal with children is very good; they are encouraging and lenient, yet they maintain discipline."

The teachers also agreed completely that the librarian, who worked primarily with reference skills in the upper grades, served an important function in the reading program. Comments most often repeated by the teachers about the librarian were "knows IPI [the reading program in use]," "communicates

student needs to teachers," and "locates information for teachers." The general picture in the school is of a diverse network of people all focused on students and working within the framework of a single, well implemented reading program. Goals and roles were well defined and accepted and communication lines were open.

In the rural schools the primary coordination of reading personnel was done at the district level, due to the small size of the district. The Director of Educational Programs, Dr. M, worked closely with the language arts coordinator, who provided him feedback on teacher and student problems. The language arts coordinator, unlike the reading specialist at Urban A, devoted the largest blocks of her time to staff development (33%) and to administrative functions (33%). Assessment of students occupied 18% of her time; materials development, 10%; the remainder was spread across initial placement testing, substitute teaching, field trips, and the like. The high percentage of time spent on administrative functions reflects the large amount of coordinating the specialist did within and across the various schools. The majority of this time was spent in conferences with the district personnel, principals, and teachers, mainly concerning the progress of students. It is interesting to note that there were no

entries in the coordinator's log for working with students, other than in testing.

The tutors saw their primary importance to the reading program in providing individualized help to students. They agreed fully on the primary functions of the language arts coordinator (testing and placement of students, grouping, direction of reading committee), on the top priority in the elementary schools (reading), and on students rarely being taken from their regular reading instruction for tutoring. Communication lines with teachers were open, although some tutors felt that with the crowded physical conditions and the large numbers of students with whom they worked, too little time was available for formal meetings with teachers.

The teachers agreed on the role of the tutors and on their high value to the district reading program. The teachers also agreed that the tutors worked cooperatively with them. One teacher, for example, in commenting on the types of information she received from the tutors, said: "We'll talk about students' attitudes, where their weaknesses are. I'll try to coordinate with her if a child is having a problem--for example, with digraphs. I will concentrate on digraphs for that next week or whatever, even if it's just with that one child, and she will be doing it also."

The teachers also agreed fully on the district's top priorities (reading and math), on the central role of Dr. M, and on the major responsibilities of the language arts coordinator. In general, personnel were focused on student needs and worked cooperatively within the framework of a well managed organization.

Urban B provides an interesting contrast to the other schools for management and deployment of personnel. The principal (Mr. B), who was a physical education major in college, claimed that the district reading specialist "carries the load" in his building for reading. He admitted that personality conflicts had existed between the specialist and his staff, but he felt that he had straightened these out over the past two years. The staff, on the other hand, indicated that these conflicts still existed. There was no evidence that the principal involved himself in supervising or even monitoring reading personnel or reading progress. (Besides the part-time specialist the school had eight aides funded under Titles I and VII and a Follow Through program, plus bilingual and special education personnel.)

The reading specialist claimed that she lacked support from the district and school administration and that the teachers in the school felt that she infringed on their authority. She felt that the teachers were less negative now

towards her than several years ago, but that some teachers, especially at the 5th and 6th grade levels, remained uncooperative. According to her the school has no building-wide reading program, teachers did pretty much as they pleased and "some ... just don't teach reading." On the Federal programs her one-word description was "horrendous." Her main criticism was that students spent more time in the hall during these program periods than in the classrooms. This she attributed to the fact that the programs were supervised from outside the building (by Title I and Title VII supervisors). There was sufficient evidence to determine that the specialist was competent, well-organized, and concerned about student progress. She was not extremely tactful, but this might have been the result of frustration over the lack of leadership and support within the school. In summary, Urban B clearly did not exhibit client-centered delivery of reading services. No building-wide coordination of personnel was done, conflicts remained among personnel, and communication and cooperation were random at best.

Consistency of Instruction

Instruction which meets all of the requirements stated above may still be inefficient if instructional programs are changed frequently or if students are confronted with widely different programs at each grade level. Reading, like math and several other curricular subjects, involves a

continual development of competencies that stretches across the entire elementary grades. If the skills taught at each grade level and the approaches used to teach these skills were selected independently by each teacher, the chances are increased for either wasted time through unnecessary repetition or confusion and frustration through missing prerequisites.

Program Stability

Part of Urban A's success seems to have resulted from the familiarity which all school personnel had with the reading program. This is due, we feel, to the continual development and improvement of a single program over a 5-6 year period. Most schools use two or three programs in grades 1-6 and in addition change at least one program every four years (or sooner). The rural schools operated on a tri-basal approach (i.e., three different basal reading programs in each class) and changed at least one of these programs every 4-5 years. When asked why they change so frequently, the replies centered on two factors: (a) sometimes programs don't work and therefore you don't want to keep them any longer than necessary, and (b) teachers get bored with the same programs year after year.

Careful screening and adaptation can probably overcome the first factor. On the second, Urban A claimed to have avoided this problem by frequent additions of supplementary

materials and by having teachers set goals each year and keeping them focused on these goals (e.g., increase the time spent on content area reading). New programs require not only added expenses, but also a year or two of teacher time before they are used efficiently. For schools that coordinate extra personnel in the reading program (aides, specialist, etc.) even more time is probably needed before all roles are learned and well integrated. There is a further and more subtle problem we find with rapid change of reading programs. Urban A clearly believes that teaching reading is their responsibility, not that of the program. When instructional problems occurred, they were resolved by the reading staff: new materials developed, students reassessed and regrouped, teachers taught new approaches. When programs are changed frequently, we suspect that the programs become the focus of instruction rather than the inventiveness of the staff. Less dependence on local problem solving is developed since with a little patience a totally new program can be obtained. Furthermore, there is probably a reluctance to invest time and resources in supplementing and adapting a program if it's not to be used for a long time. It is interesting to note that the four successful schools identified in a survey of reading achievement in ghetto schools had taken from three to eight years to develop their reading programs.¹⁴

Compatibility Across Grades (And Schools)

One effect of not having a building-wide reading program is that the transitions from grade to grade often cause inefficiencies in instruction. A teacher in grade 3, for example, might need to terminate her own program early so she (or he) has time to prepare students for a totally new program or new approach to reading in grade 4. Or, as occurred several years ago in Rural Schools A and B, some teachers might demand that students start at the beginning of a reading book at the start of the school year. Teachers, therefore, will be reluctant to allow a student to begin a new reading level near the end of the school year.

Urban A avoided these problems by having a single reading program with a single continuum of skills for grades 1-6 and an efficient record keeping system. The rural schools had transition problems, but resolved them through teacher retraining and improved record keeping.

Conclusions

Having presented our case for achievement orientation and instructional efficiency, we are now faced with two new issues. First, how are these two factors linked to student achievement and second, what can schools and school districts do to incorporate these virtues into their own instructional

organizations? On the first question we speculate that the line of effect is as follows. First, an achievement orientation leads to the conditions within a school that allow an instructionally efficient system to be implemented, if the know-how is present. Just as certain atmospheric conditions are conducive to rain, so is an achievement orientation conducive to efficient instruction. But neither are sufficient conditions. In the former moisture must be added and in the latter, well-organized instructional procedures are needed.

When efficient instruction exists, we speculate that its effectiveness results from the increase in appropriate instruction which each child receives. Under 'casual' instructional conditions, or under conditions of insufficient resources, teachers cannot attend sufficiently to all of the classroom needs. Some learning problems will be ignored, either because the teacher doesn't have the time or materials to deal with them, or because the teachers is not aware that they exist. Aides, tutors, and remedial specialists can all increase the total effectiveness of a program if they are coordinated with the classroom instruction. But an army of extra-classroom personnel can also interfere with instruction if they are not properly managed.

Others would view this increase in appropriate instruction as an increase in either time-on-task or academic engaged time.¹⁵ Time, and especially academic engaged time, are important for achievement. But not all academically engaging activities are effective for instruction, as a study published almost 15 years ago demonstrated clearly for elementary reading instruction.¹⁶ In this study, time spent on one group of reading activities correlated positively and significantly with reading achievement, but time on another group of activities which the teachers labeled 'reading' did not. In addition, time-on-task has meant so far time in the classroom spent on specific learning tasks.

Time spent on homework may be equally important, as might other forms of out of school learning, as suggested by J. M. Stephens.¹⁷ Thus, the most important result of an achievement oriented, efficient instructional system might be to convince students that learning to read is highly important and that they should take every opportunity possible to bone up on the matter.

In short, instructional efficiency means more careful monitoring of individual needs, better instructional assistance for the teacher, more relevant instruction for the students, and less time wasted in the transitions from grade to grade.

If these arguments are rational and the conclusions acceptable, what implications can be drawn for improving other schools? The more cautious researcher would no doubt want to replicate these studies, using another sample of schools and perhaps slightly more efficient data collection techniques. We plan to do this ourselves, starting this September (1979) in a major east coast city that has agreed to make its schools available to us. But we also feel that there is equal merit to the approach suggested by one of the early pioneers in reading research, W. F. Dearborn, when he stated "If you want to understand something, try to change it."¹⁸

School districts are already aware that principals need to be curricular leaders. Furthermore, the factors we suggest for instructional efficiency would fit almost anyone's shopping list for instructional renovation. What we suggest for improving reading instruction, therefore, is:

1. School districts should build curricular leadership into their evaluation criteria for principals. Required activities should include frequent meetings with the lead reading teachers or specialist, coordinating plans for the reading staff (aides, tutors, etc.), and periodic monitoring of student progress.

2. Inservice classes should be given for principals to teach them different approaches to the responsibilities listed in 1, and about reading in general.
3. Schools should be required to adopt 2-3 year plans for making their reading instruction more efficient. These plans should attend to such factors as grade-to-grade transitions, grouping, assessment, record keeping, and reporting.
4. Schools and school districts should be made more aware of the programs in other schools that succeed in teaching reading. There is nothing wrong with reinventing the wheel if one's interest is in invention rather than in wheels. For reading, however, we should opt for the 'wheel' category.

In short, the emphasis in reading instruction needs to be shifted away from instructional methods and teacher accountability and onto the principal's leadership role and the efficiency of the entire building's instructional program. If this is done, with a concomitant emphasis on quality of education, we might see more and more children from low SES areas becoming good readers and more and more of the public adopting a positive attitude toward public schooling.

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Footnotes

¹ Urban A and Urban B test scores for reading, language, math, science, and social studies are shown in Tables 1 and 2 below. The year-end reading scores for Urban A from 1972 until 1978 are shown in Table 3. Except for the dropping of sixth grade at Urban A from 1972/73 until 1977/78, the structure and student characteristics of both Urban A and Urban B remained relatively constant from 1972 until 1978.

To determine if extraordinary efforts are made to inflate or deflate test scores, 10 classrooms in Urban A were observed during the Fall 1977 administration of the CTBS. Observers recorded observations on total testing time, approach to introducing the test, use of example items, behavior of class, and teacher interaction with students during testing. Although introductory approaches varied from teacher to teacher, no extraordinary behavior was observed.

 Insert Tables 1 and 2 and 3 about here

² The present study, which began in August 1977 and was concluded only recently, focused primarily upon a small number of schools that were succeeding where failure was expected. Considerably more time was spent examining schools like Urban A than like Urban B. Emphasis in reporting is placed on people and processes rather than upon quantitative data. (For the most part tables, charts and scholarly references have been relegated to footnotes.) Yet this is not an ethnographic study in the sense of Rist (1975), in that only a limited set of variables were examined, an occasional counting was done, and few observer accounts were made. Our methodology (and reporting styles) is perhaps closer to the naturalistic inquiry approach as described by Guba (1978).

Weber (1970) established the groundwork for studies like the present by identifying and analyzing four low income schools in the USA that succeeded in reading instruction. Weber's primary goal was to establish that such schools existed; however, in visiting the schools that seemed to meet his initial criteria for success, he found that certain school-wide factors distinguished four truly successful schools from all others. These factors included (a) strong leadership for reading, (b) a high degree of individualization in instruction, (c) positive attitudes towards children and their abilities to succeed, and (d) establishing reading as a top school priority. Similar results were reported by the New York State

Division of Education Evaluation (1974) from a study of 12 outlier schools, and by an ETS study of Title I schools (Wilder, n.d.). For a somewhat different approach to case studies of ghetto schools, see Sowell (1976).

³The material which follows is based upon interviews, analyses of test scores and of school memos, work logs kept by reading specialists, and classroom observations.

Interviews

In Urban A, approximately 10 interviews of about one hour each were held with the principal. The assistant principal was interviewed twice for a total of about one and a half hours and the reading specialist, five times for a total of five hours. Other interviews were held with the librarian (one hour), aides (all five were interviewed for about one-half hour each), part-time reading specialist (one hour), and teachers (12 were interviewed for about 45 minutes each). In Urban B, two interviews of about an hour each were held with the principal; hour-long interviews were also held with the reading specialist, remedial reading teacher, two teachers, and the head secretary. In the rural schools to be mentioned shortly, approximately 35 hours of interviews were divided among the superintendent, three principals (one of whom was Dr. M), two reading coordinators (the second reading coordinator was a maternity leave fill-in for the regular coordinator), four tutors, and 12 teachers.

Interviews with teachers and aides were guided by questionnaires; all other interviews were open-ended.

School Memos

Memos to staff and parents, including regular newsletters, were collected from Urban A and from the rural schools for the last several years. No memos were available from Urban B. Since no logs of correspondences are kept, we could not determine, other than from occasional internal references, how complete these collections were. These memos were analyzed both for amount of space devoted to reading and for general emphasis and language.

Reading Specialist Logs

A log of the Urban A reading specialist's daily activities was obtained for approximately two-thirds of the school year. This log included 611 separate activities, covering 43,407 minutes. A log covering 12 working days was also obtained from the reading coordinator for the rural schools. This log covered 92 separate activities for a total of 4,870 minutes.

Observation

Classroom visits were made in all schools. In addition, a classroom observation scheme was tested in Urban A for recording academic engaged time for reading, but was dropped because it required more of the project resources than we wished to allocate to it.

The reading programs in the main schools of interest were as follows:

Urban A: Individually Prescribed Education (IPI) was used in Grades 1-6, with the Harper and Row Reading Program used for directed reading in Grades 3-6. IPI is a skills-oriented program, built around a mastery paradigm.

Urban B: The district's single-basal program (Harper and Row) was used.

Rural Schools: Two basal programs, Ginn 360 and Macmillan Series R, were used in Grades 1-8 in the 1977/78 school year, although a third basal was scheduled for adoption in 1978/79.

⁴On Fiedler's Least Preferred Coworker (LPC) Scale, Mr. A received a mean rating of 3.61, which places him in the low LPC leader category. This implies that he achieves "satisfaction and self-esteem from the group's completion of a task rather than through interpersonal relations" (Fiedler, 1967).

⁵E.g., Weber 1970; New York State Department of Education, 1974.

⁶Reading in Cleveland Schools, 1974.

⁷Fiedler, 1967.

⁸Maryland State Department of Education, 1978, p. 78. 'Residual' in this context means far above or below predicted performance.

⁹Thompson and DeLeonibus, 1978.

¹⁰Wellisch, MacQueen, Carriere, and Duck, 1978.

¹¹See Thompson, 1967.

¹²NIE, 1977.

¹³See Filley and House, 1969.

¹⁴Weber, 1970.

¹⁵See Rosenshine, 1977, for a summary of recent studies on academic engaged time.

¹⁶Harris and Serwer, 1966.

¹⁷Cf. Stephens, 1967.

¹⁸Cited in Bronfenbrenner, 1976.

Table 1
 Mean Grade Equivalents
 for Urban School A in April 1978
 (CTBS - Form S)

Grade	N	Norm	Reading	Language	Math	Science	Social Studies
1	110	1.7	1.9	1.8	2.1	---	---
2	145	2.7	2.9	3.3	3.1	3.5	4.1
3	125	3.7	4.1	4.2	3.6	3.8	3.9
4	116	4.7	5.3	5.1	4.4	5.1	4.5
5	110	5.7	5.8	6.3	5.3	5.5	5.8
6	125	6.7	7.0	7.2	6.2	6.7	6.6

Table 2
 Mean Grade Equivalents
 for Urban School B in April 1978
 (CTBS - Form S)

Grade	N	Norm	Reading	Language	Math	Science	Social Studies
1	85	1.7	1.8	1.5	1.8	---	---
2	85	2.7	2.2	2.5	2.2	1.9	2.0
3	108	3.7	2.7	2.9	2.9	2.8	2.7
4	82	4.7	4.4	4.4	4.2	4.0	4.0
5	90	5.7	4.9	5.4	5.2	5.0	4.6
6	114	6.7	5.0	5.5	5.2	5.6	5.0

Table 3

Year-end Reading Scores for Urban School A
in Mean Grade Equivalent Deviations
from the National Norms, 1972-1978
(CTBS - Form S)

Grade	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978
1	(a)	(a)	+1	+1	+1	+2	+2
2	(a)	(a)	-.2	+2	-.1	+4	+2
3	-.8	-.4	-.2	+6	+6	+8	+4
4	-.8	-.7	-.3	+3	+5	+1.2	+6
5	-1.1	-1.1	-1.0	0	-.7	+3	+1
6	-2.2	(b)	(b)	(b)	(b)	(b)	+3

^aCTBS not given

^bNo 6th grade at Urban A